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PAPER NATIONALISM: MATERIAL TEXTUALITY AND COMMUNAL AFFILIATION IN EARLY AMERICA



Jonathan Senchyne

On the verge of the U.S. Civil War, mere days after the *Dred Scott* decision, Pastor M. Emory Wright of Holyoke, Massachusetts wished that, for just one day, the disjointed social order of humanity would run more like a paper mill. Wright had visited the Parsons Paper Mill in Holyoke and was writing a narrative of his tour in the March 1857 *National Magazine*, an account that he expanded into a pamphlet that same month. Wright was fascinated with the size of the machine and its minute calibrations coordinating different parts so that it produced a single unbroken roll of paper out of the shreds of diverse rags. “In the movements of this wonderful machine,” Wright says, “with its almost infinitude of parts, the least degree of success requires well-nigh a hair-breadth accuracy in the adjustment of every feature.” As he talks to millworkers and observes the machine, Wright’s admiration of the papermaking process heightens as his imagination grants the machine the character of a nation. “In reply to some remark of mine ...,” he continues, “the operator philosophically observed: ‘We can’t do anything unless all parts of the machine *draw together*.’” Despite the fact that “the machine occupies ... eleven hundred square feet,” and that the belt of paper travels “one hundred feet” through it, Wright finds that the machine runs with a “completeness and perfect correspondence of all the parts, that, aside from occasional breakages, which are inevitable, and the adjustments which the different varieties of paper always require, no extraordinary interruption may occur for weeks, or even months.” The ability to draw together, to correspond, and to mend inevitable disruptions seemed to him an impossible wish for the United States that Abraham Lincoln would the next summer compare to a “house divided.” “A thousand pities,” Wright concludes, “that the multitudinous wheels, and cranks, and pinions of human society, which so often so ruinously break, or hideously creak, could not, for at least

one diurnal revolution, as smoothly and harmoniously move as the complicated machinery of the paper mill.”¹

Here Wright offers a model of the relation of text to community different from the Habermasian model of the public sphere that Americanist book history has largely adopted since the early 1990s.² Unlike Jürgen Habermas’s focus on print’s construction of common reading and debate, Benedict Anderson’s imagined communal spaces and times of periodical publication, or Michael Warner’s emphasis on print’s anonymizing and republican visual culture, Wright finds models for affiliative community in the very materiality of texts and their manufacture. Usefully, Wright’s focus on materiality restores to our reading practices more capacious ways of understanding the political communities assembled by books, print, and other material texts. The field’s growing attention to materiality and ways of reading its textuality has the potential to move us beyond the still regnant Habermasian model, and can reveal relations of persons, publics, and texts that are more inclusive and heterogeneous than the continued privileging of print, writing, and authorship. The publics that material texts organize and represent need not rise out of the literate intellect; they are also constituted through labor and sensual experience.

In this essay, I assemble an archive of everyday and literary writing about paper from the late seventeenth century to the mid-nineteenth, a period roughly covering the duration of rag paper production in the colonies and the U.S., and trace how these writings evince a way of reading and experiencing communal affiliation through the very materiality of paper. Paper serves as an important example of reading materiality because it has a material text whether or not it bears print or script on its surface. For example, a blank book and printed book both have a material text. Here, I develop the idea of *paper nationalism* as a material textual alternative to print nationalism or print republicanism, a way of understanding how the materiality of paper, along with or separate from whatever might be written on it, can represent or construct communal and political affiliation. By placing paper nationalism in conversation with print nationalism/republicanism, I suggest how existing concepts in the field might be augmented or challenged by new focus on materiality. However, I am not arguing that critical practice in book history should eschew alphabetic text and shift all attention to paper, or even to materiality. Paper is one site, among many, where book historians may further develop the idea of material textuality.

Relatedly, scholars including Lisa Gitelman and Ben Kafka have been establishing the area of “paperwork studies,” wherein the scales, forms, and

systems of management that emerge from paper as a ubiquitous material and technology take precedence over the information individual pieces of paper carry.³ In her recent book, *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents*, Gitelman points out that books get outsized attention in the history of print given the extent to which printers' outputs were dominated by job printing and the creation of blanks: papers to be filled in (or not), but which are neither "authored [n]or read."⁴ Therefore, she argues, book historians need to think beyond habits that "organize [the field] around accounts of authors, editors, booksellers, publishers, and readers."⁵ Focusing on paper instead of print, or at least commonly privileged kinds of print, can also lead us to insights about the roles media play in political formations, as in Kafka's study of the relationship between paper and statecraft, specifically bureaucracy. In *The Demon of Writing: Powers and Failures of Paperwork*, Kafka studies how "paperwork became a technology of political representation;" that is, not only how the form of the blank decentralizes authors/readers from print, as in Gitelman, but also how they model and create the "depersonalization of power" as a feature of public formation in the eighteenth century.⁶ I follow Gitelman and Kafka in the choice of paper as an object of study and in the conviction that focusing on the materiality of texts sheds important new light on our reading practices and social formations. To their work I introduce an archive of seventeenth- through nineteenth-century American "technotexts" about paper, and demonstrate that reading techno-textual literature about paper's materiality reveals the sensual and political possibilities of the period in new ways. A technotext, as defined by N. Katherine Hayles, is "a literary work that interrogates the inscription technology that produces it, mobiliz[ing] reflexive loops between its imaginative world and the material apparatus embodying that creation as a physical presence."⁷ These technotexts of paper are the words through which writers described real and imagined relations to the materiality of paper, and they therefore give us insight into the possible meanings of supposedly mute materiality in the period. They are evidence that it was, and is, just as possible to "read" political affiliation through the materiality of a text as through the text's written content. And in moving our field beyond Habermas in the present, we might, in fact, find it desirable to do so.

Paper Nation

As long as it was made from cloth rags, paper and its production offered writers of everything from advertising copy to poetry and fiction a set of material metaphors through which to figure the nation.⁸ Because a sheet of paper was made from the particles of hundreds, if not thousands, of rags that were shredded, pulped, and reconstituted into a single sheet, and because those rags were often collected from the homes of those living near the mills, the page came to be seen as a concrete manifestation of the body politic. Put simply, one could say of both the nation and the sheet of paper, *out of many, one*. M. Emory Wright recognizes this in the machine, but also in the sheet of paper itself. He observes: “The floors [of the mill rag room] are piled and littered with rags, of all imaginable sorts, sizes, and colors, mingled in such hopeless confusion as apparently to defy the most patient efforts to classify them. An unpractised [sic] eye would surely not select those torn and filthy fragments as representatives of even a nominal value. But a few hours shall witness the truly marvelous transformation of that unsightly mass of ‘shreds and patches’ into an article of such beauty and utility that the admiration of the nicest critic may be successfully challenged.”⁹ The diversity of rags, shreds, patches—all plural nouns—are incorporated into the singular, “article,” and in the process of combination are turned into something of value. Wright does not explicitly link the turning of cloth shreds into a sheet to nation formation in the passage just quoted, but it reads that way when seen as part of the longer tradition of literary writing and visual/material culture that this essay synthesizes. Papermakers, for example, emblazoned the wrappers that held reams of paper together with the “E Pluribus Unum” motto (Figure 1). The presence of this motto indicates not only that nation building was linked with commodity production in the early republic, but also that papermaking offered a metaphor, grounded in familiar material practices, for turning the many into the one. Just as the eagle represents the union of federated states, the ream wrapper produces “ONE REAM” out of hundreds of sheets of paper—sheets which are, in turn, the product of many rags.

Being attentive to narratives like Wright’s provides a key for understanding more fully the role of print, or more specifically the role of the material text, in the production of the nation as both an ideological affiliation and a material practice. Americanist book history has been heavily invested in understanding the role of print in the formation of republican government and national culture. Warner, bringing ideas from Habermas and Anderson

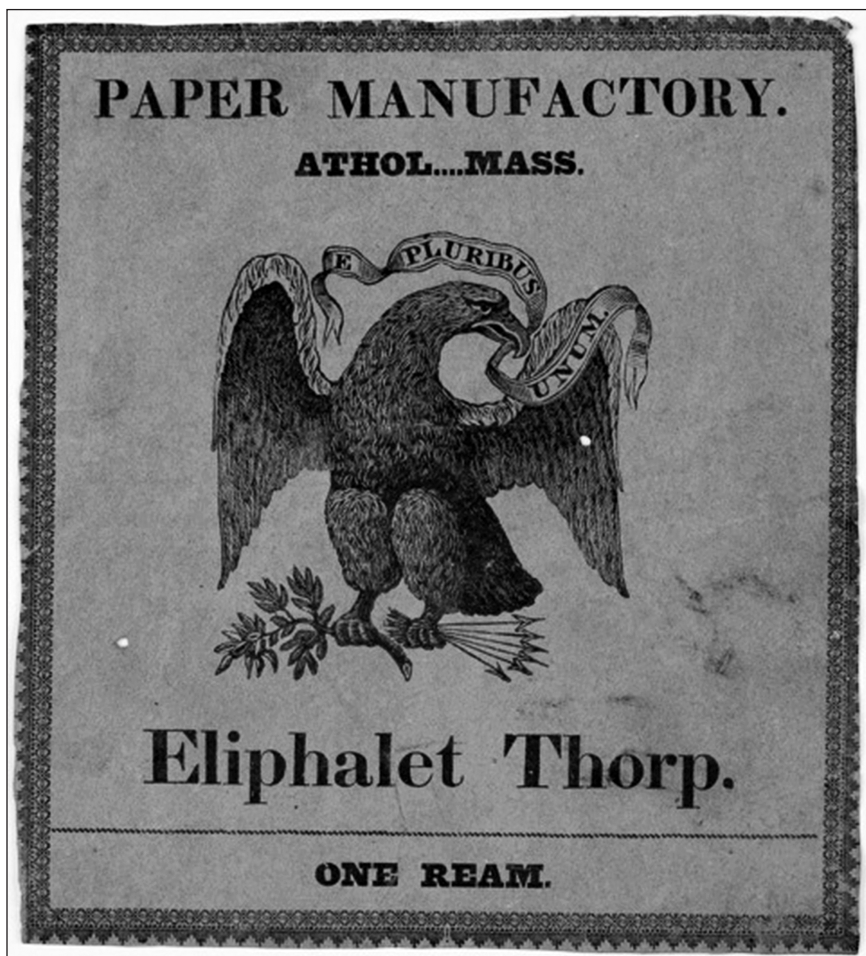


Figure 1. Ream wrapper of Eliphalet Thorp's Athol, Massachusetts paper mill, ca. 1813–1820. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

to bear on early American literature, influentially demonstrated how in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it became “possible to imagine oneself, in the act of reading [the impersonal printed object], becoming part of an arena of the national people that cannot be realized except through such mediated imaginings.” In the effort to understand how reading practices and the circulation of print developed a print public sphere in which “an individual reads in a manner that implicitly relates him- or herself to the indefinite others of a print public,” such models have not paid full attention

to how the production of the material text, rather than the circulation and consumption of print, was itself a mediated imagining of self to others in the colony or nation.¹⁰ The scholarship largely takes the material existence of texts for granted even though writing of the period often focuses on the difficulties and uncertainties of sustaining the production of printed materials, and through them, communities.¹¹

The paper manufactory represented Pastor Wright's desire for a union of diverse constituent parts that, with the right negotiation, would correspond. We need to look no further than Wright's "thousand pities," or his essay's simultaneity with the *Dred Scott* decision, to understand that such a goal was far from reality. Accordingly, the idea of "paper nationalism" is not meant to recuperate the nation or nationalism as meaningful frame narratives for the study of colonial and U.S. culture. Rather, how does a metaphorical understanding of paper, developed in relation to a technical understanding of paper, recruit communities to both a material practice of papermaking that was beneficial to the private and public interests of the state and an ideological sense of unification? This literature negotiates the dialectical relationship between the material reality of papermaking (the Fourdrinier machine *was* large and incorporated many moving parts) and the metaphors of publicity, nation, gender, race, and sexuality that—as in Wright's longing for a nation on the model of the paper mill—people projected onto paper. They certainly are different things, but at times it can be difficult to tell them apart. A single sheet of paper really was composed of thousands of shreds of cloth collected from all over, and possibly from within one's own community. Thus it is not unimaginable, if a bit fantastical, to entertain the unlikely possibility of one's own shirt being comingled with the neighbor's in the paper one read. Into the space of that unlikelihood, however, entered a wide range of texts that encouraged and manipulated such identifications.

Joseph Addison's *Spectator* for May 1, 1712, exemplifies this process. In this entry, "Mr. Spectator" (who, following Habermas, embodies the formation of an eighteenth-century literary public sphere's self-recognition in print), concerns himself with paper. That is, in the question of how *The Spectator* unites its public, the paper on which it is printed takes precedence over what is printed on it. Addison fashions *The Spectator* as the connective tissue of the English public through the "Material and the Formal ... Benefits which accrue to the Publick from these my Speculations." Included in the "formal" benefits of *The Spectator*—what Addison describes as "those Advantages which my Readers receive, as their Minds are either improv'd or delighted by these my daily Labours"—is what Habermas and others

have theorized as the rise of a public sphere comprised of private individuals using reason. Addison puts the formal benefits of the publication on equal footing with the material, and then spends the rest of his column expounding upon them. “By the Word Material” Addison says he means “those Benefits which arise to the Publick from these my Speculations, as they consume a considerable quantity of our Paper Manufacture, employ our Artisans in Printing, and find Business for great Numbers of Indigent Persons.” In other words, if a lot of people read *The Spectator* and benefit the public, it’s equally important that a lot of people work to make the *The Spectator* as a material object. But if Addison pays attention to the construction of the public through the material text, scholars of the public sphere, except when citing circulation numbers of printed materials, generally have not.

The Spectator’s need for paper, and the production of it, draws together everyone from the “Prince” to “Indigent Persons.” Reading and discussing content is an important aspect of *The Spectator*’s service to the public, but it cannot happen without the production of paper, a process that “takes into it several mean Materials which could be put to no other use, and affords Work for several Hands in the collecting of them.... The whole Nation is in a great measure supply’d with a Manufacture, for which formerly she was obliged to her Neighbours.”¹² Producing *The Spectator* requires so many workers in different sectors of the economy that papermaking links the rag picker, the merchant, the industrialist, and the landlord. Further, the domestic supply protects the nation from dependence on foreign sources. Congratulating himself, Mr. Spectator writes, “In short, when I trace in my Mind a Bundle of Rags to a Quire of Spectators, I find so many Hands employ’d in every Step they take thro’ their whole Progress, that while I am writing a Spectator, I fancy my self providing Bread for a Multitude.”¹³ What links England together in this narrative is not a national character, race, or culture: it is having had physical contact with rag or paper somewhere in the process of producing and using *The Spectator*. Circulations of rags and paper create material links between people and across the social body. “It is pleasant enough to consider the Changes that a Linnen Fragment undergoes, by passing thro’ the several Hands above mentioned,” Mr. Spectator muses. Dutch linens come into the country as cloth and leave as letters in the post: “The finest pieces of Holland, when worn to Tatters, assume a new Whiteness more beautiful than their first, and often return in the shape of Letters to their Native Country.” In this material world of print, the text links together the chiffonier picking rags in the dung hill with the royal family: “In a word, a Piece of Cloth, after having officiated for some Years as

a Towel or a Napkin, may by this means be raised from a Dung-hill, and become the most valuable Piece of Furniture in a Prince's Cabinet."¹⁴

In explaining how paper manufacture links the public together, Mr. Spectator provides an alternative, materially oriented account of how *The Spectator* organizes publics beyond the political reading and conversation of the coffeehouse. The material text arranges publics outside of reading and the use of reason, and paying attention to their creation and circulation brings a range of other actors, like the indigent rag picker, into focus.

Imagining Community on Paper

Moving across the Atlantic, we can see how concern over the availability of rags and paper converged with concern for the very preservation of the infant American state. The Continental Army became a locus of this worry. One Providence newspaper connects the availability of rags and paper to the success of the Army during the war: "As paper is now much wanted for the army, and other necessary purposes (which cannot be manufactured without rags) it is hoped every friend of America will encourage the saving and collecting them."¹⁵ A popular legend about Benjamin Franklin's attic warehouse further illustrates this situation. Before the Battle of Monmouth in 1778, soldiers searched Philadelphia for paper that could be used to make cartridges and wadding for rifles. Twenty-five hundred copies of the Rev. Gilbert Tennent's *Late Association for Defence Farther Encouraged: Or, Defensive War Defended, with True Christianity* are said to have been held for nonpayment in the "garret" attic of Benjamin Franklin's print shop. These were then torn up and used for cartridges and wadding at Monmouth. When this story is retold, emphasis is placed on the relation of the content of the printed matter, on defensive war, and its use in the world not as something to be read, but as weaponry. An early twentieth-century history of papermaking retells the story under the heading "A sermon effectively delivered," playing, of course, on the "delivery" of the sermon at the end of a rifle. "These [pamphlets] were used for musket cartridges and 'wadding,'" begins the retelling before going further in connecting the author and the scene of war. "The battle ... raged about old Tenant church, where fought representatives from every one of the thirteen colonies, mingling their patriotic blood upon the historic field, the sermon proved one of the most effective ever delivered. The Rev. Mr. Tenant, when he penned his discourse, probably had no idea that it would ever be delivered in so force-

ful a manner, just outside the doors of his church.”¹⁶ Paper, here, is more important as wadding than as a public-sphere medium for ideas and debates about defense. Paper functions similarly, however, even when it serves as reading material.

There is, to use a term of Jacques Derrida’s, a very real sense in which the state is a “paper machine.” Paper, Derrida points out, “hold[s] a sacred power. It has the force of law, it gives accreditation, it incorporates, it even embodies the soul of the law, its letter and its spirit.” Paper is “indissociable from the Ministry of Justice ... from the rituals of legalization and legitimation, from the archive of charters and constitutions for what we call, in the double sense of the word, *acts*.”¹⁷ We need look no further than “undocumented persons,” or the *sans-papiers*, to understand how paper and its metaphors actually and figuratively constitute the state and its imaginary. For it is still through “the legitimating authority of paper” that we are (or are not) accredited as citizens, workers, visitors, and bearers of rights. “Here I am,” Derrida writes, “this is my body, see this signature on this paper—it’s me, it’s mine, it’s me so-and-so, I sign before you, I present myself here; this paper that remains represents me.”¹⁸ In these moments we find neither the simple fact of paper documents nor a simple metaphor for paper, but an act, or a *performative of paper*. The dialectic described above between the material facts of paper and papermaking and the metaphorical and ideological work for which paper is recruited produces this tension. “Indeterminate matter but already virtuality, *dynamis* as potentiality but also as power, power incorporated in a natural matter but force of law, informal matter for information but already form and act, act as action but also as archive—there you have the assumed tensions or contradictions that have to be thought under the name of ‘paper.’”¹⁹ Where we have studied the effects of printed material in the construction of collectivities, nations, and publics, we have largely taken the material existence of those texts for granted despite the fact that their writers and readers emphatically did not.

In 1765, Benjamin Franklin Mecom, nephew of Benjamin Franklin, printed *A New Collection of Verses Applied to the First of November, A.D. 1765, &c. Including a Prediction that the S--p-A-t shall not take Place in North-America, Together with A poetical DREAM CONCERNING Stamped PAPERS*, a thinly-veiled protest against the Stamp Act. In the “poetical dream,” the speaker happens upon a group of anthropomorphized papers complaining about the adverse affects the Stamp Act will have on their role in mediating America. “One Night,” recalls the dreamer:

[A]s I lay slumbering in my Bed,
 Dark Images crouded [sic] into my Head.
 I thought, as through the Town I walk'd alone,
 I, at a Distance heard a grievous Moan.
 Attention rous'd; I then approach'd more near,
 And found a Croud [sic] of PAPERS gather'd there.
 To each of them, as to the Prophet's Ass,
 A Tongue was giv'n to tell his wretched Case....
 They spoke by Turns: In this they all agree,
 To plead the Cause of *English Liberty*:
 And deprecate the Woe, which each one thought
 Would, by the St--p-A-t, soon on them be brought.²⁰

One by one, the papers speak about how, by taxing official documents and other papers, the Stamp Act will be injurious to the health of the colonies, and to the “English Liberty” of colonists. In order of appearance, the personified papers are “the Bond,” the “Papers of the Court: Summons and Writ,” “Probate Papers,” “Diploma,” “License Paper,” “[News]Paper,” and the “Almanack.” The papers include those that perform acts of the state, such as the bond that is “so much Use / To Men of all Professions, rich and Poor, / Whose Property I daily do secure,” or the summons and writ that “call'd the Debtor to discharge his Debt,” and that “many Rogues at Justice' [sic] Bar have set.” They also include papers that constitute the print public sphere such as the almanac that “try'd ... to please / Both Rich and Poor, and Men of all Degrees” by talking about “the Stars and future Scenes.” The newspaper claims a position of prominence among all the papers, crying out:

Who, of ye all, has shewn a readier Mind,
 At once to please and profit all Mankind?
 I travel far and near; the World I range
 And carry with me all that's *new* and strange.
 Advices of Importance I convey;
 As well as merry Tales, to please the Gay.
 Must I be burden'd with this cruel St--p,
 Which will my Speed and Progress greatly cramp?²¹

The Stamp Act, according to the speaking papers, threatens not only the production of persons documented in deeds and diplomas, but the drawing together of “Men of all Degrees” within reading publics.

Any discussion of the “Speed and Progress” of the periodical press with respect to the health of a polity should make us think of *Imagined Communities*, in which Benedict Anderson asserts the importance of print periodicals in generating a large impersonal population’s realization of its own national consciousness. The newspaper produces a ritual of reading with unknown others in both simultaneity and anonymity; it emplots national consciousness. Anderson writes:

The obsolescence of the newspaper on the morrow of its printing ... creates this extraordinary mass ceremony: the almost precisely simultaneous consumption (“imagining”) of the newspaper-as-fiction. We know that particular morning and evening editions will overwhelmingly be consumed between this hour and that.... The newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbors, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life.... creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations.²²

And thus in the *Poetical Dream*, the speaking newspaper emphasizes that the Stamp Act will impede the paper’s function in time and space. The newspaper’s “far and near” reach and the temporality of its serial publication, or its “Speed and Progress,” will be “greatly cramp[ed].” The same goes for the almanac which is published annually but “if deny’d [reprieve from the Stamp Act] I fear / I cannot live to see another Year.”²³ The speaking papers of the *Poetical Dream* unsettle the notion of a stable material world of print from which print culture or print nationalism might arise.

Anderson’s foundational narrative relies on the promise of serial time, the notion that today’s newspaper will be obsolete tomorrow when it is replaced by tomorrow’s edition. However, the rituals of community in anonymity come under threat as the *Poetical Dream*’s speaker hears “The wretched Papers [sic] dying Groans.”²⁴ The *Poetical Dream* requires us to think about what happens when the ritual consumption of the newspaper comes under threat. Even though Anderson is willing to treat the newspaper as a commodity, paper appears in its fetish character within his imagination of community. That is, the newspaper appears to readers for consumption without consideration of how it was produced. Thus, as it’s offered, Anderson’s theory of print nationalism depends on readers’ belief—Anderson calls it their “remarkable confidence”—in the future consumption of newspapers without offering an account of the material conditions that would allow

this. Forgetting the half of Robert Darnton's "communications circuit" that represents the printers, suppliers, shippers, and booksellers, one is asked to accept that the newspaper will simply be there.²⁵

This is not how colonial Americans experienced the newspaper. Rags were always in short supply, threatening to choke the progress of paper-making, which meant that pleas for rags were present in the everyday lives of readers. These pleas yoked the fate of printed material to the fate of the colonies and then the nation, and recruited readers to do a patriotic duty by collecting rags for the production of paper. A broadside advertisement printed and distributed in January 1777 provides one example of how these matters were linked:

Among the necessary articles wherewith America has usually been supplied from abroad, PAPER was a very considerable and important one; we could not subsist, in a state of society without it. And very large sums were annually paid and lent out of America for the purchase of it; but since our disunion with Great Britain, our supplies of paper from thence have totally ceased, and almost from every other part of the World; so that the United States of America, are reduced to the necessity of suffering the great inconveniences, through want of that necessary article; or of becoming manufacturers of it themselves.²⁶

Here, the author suggests that paper is necessary to maintain the cohesiveness of society. This might seem like a hyperbolic claim, but it is hardly exceptional. A column in the *Connecticut Courant* from September 1777 makes a similar case. "Consider their [the paper mill owners'] distress on account of the scarcity of RAGS. The business of Paper-Making and Printing is at an end if Rags are not to be had.... The News Paper must inevitably stop, or be reduced to a half sheet—The Schools will be essentially affected, and all writing business cease."²⁷ The making of paper itself becomes a primary concern for building and conducting the nation. The state of society is maintained on paper through documents, newspapers, and literate activity in the public sphere, but early American newspapers reiterate their uncertain existence unless readers contribute to the process of producing paper. This is hardly the "remarkable confidence of community in anonymity ... the hallmark of modern nations," but a deep worry about the existence of paper and the precariousness of the communal or national frame. If the United States is to become a separate entity from Great Britain, then they must become "manufacturers of it themselves."

As early as the 1690s, paper had already figured in the symbolic logic of the colonies' independence from England. The first large-scale paper mill in North America was established in Germantown outside Philadelphia in 1690, and it figures prominently in Richard Frame's 1692 poetic survey of Pennsylvania, "A Short Description of Pennsylvania, Or, a RELATION What things are known, enjoyed, and like to be discovered in the said Province Presented as a Token of Good Will to the People of England." Frame describes the riches of Pennsylvania with an eye to attracting investment from fellow Englishmen across the Atlantic:

TO all our Friends that do desire to know.
 What Country 'tis we live in, this will show.
 Attend to hear the Story I shall tell,
 No doubt but you will like this Country well. . . .
 Here are more things than I can well express,
 Strange to be seen in such a Wilderness.
 By Day we work, at Night we rest in Peace,
 So that each Day our Substance doth increase:
 O blessed be his Name, who doth provide
 For you, and us, and all the World beside. . . .

The many apparent riches of Pennsylvania include livestock, vegetation, precious metals, and strong building materials, but at the conclusion of the poem Frame notes a certain synergy between the work of the Germans and Dutch, whose expertise in producing linen and paper merge to produce a symbiotic relation.

The German-Town of which I spoke before,
 Which is, at last, in length one Mile and More,
 Where lives High-German People, and Low-Dutch,
 Whose Trade in weaving Linnin Cloth is much,
 There grows the Flax, as also you may know,
 That from the same they do divide the Tow;
 Their Trade fits well within this Habitation,
 We find Convenience for their Occupation.
 One Trade brings in employment for another.
 So that we may suppose each Trade a Brother;
 From Linnin Rags good Paper doth derive,
 The first trade keeps the second Trade alive:
 Without the first the second cannot be,
 Therefore since these two can so well agree,

Convenience doth approve to place them nigh,
 One in the German-Town, 'tother hard by.
 A Paper Mill near German-Town doth stand,
 So that the Flax, which first springs from the Land,
 First Flax, then Yarn, and then they must begin,
 To weave the same, which they took pains to spin.
 Also, when on our backs it is well worn,
 Some of the same remains Ragged and Torn;
 Then of those Rags our Paper it is made,
 Which in process of time doth waste and fade:
 So what comes from the Earth, appeareth plain,
 The same in Time returns to Earth again.
 So much for what I have truly Compos'd,
 Which is but a part of what may be disclosed,
 Concluding of this, and what is behind,
 I may tell you more of my Mind;
 But in the mean time be content with this same,
 Which at present is all from your Friend
 RICHARD FRAME.²⁸

The fraternal manufactures of linen and paper produce a perpetual harmony. Flax grows from the ground, is woven into linen, which is worn out and eventually sent to the paper mill. Paper, too, wears out and returns to the ground where it will become flax. The circularity of this process is mirrored in the poem's rhyming couplets; paired "brothers" form codependent units as the poem progresses. Frame himself is drawn into this pairing as the poem anticipates his name and positions him as the poem's final rhyme. The rhyming couplets establish a system of pairings like linen and flax, and these pairings do not leave room for interruption from outside. That is, the rhyme scheme is uninterrupted from beginning to end, just as the cycle of dirt to flax to linen to paper to dirt continues apace: "So what comes from the Earth, appeareth plain, / The same in Time returns to Earth again." In Frame's description, papermaking does not require the importation of rags from abroad. Unlike the 1777 New Haven writer who notes that paper "has usually been supplied from abroad," Frame imagines a polity that is perfectly capable of self-sufficiently producing its own paper. Political independence may not be one of Frame's goals in 1692, but he nonetheless produces an account of a place where material abundance permits "The first trade" in rags to "[keep] the second Trade" in paper "alive." During the Revolutionary moment, this is the material and political economy that papermakers and newspaper printers desire.

If Richard Frame is included in the fraternity of end rhymes and the perfect order of productive abundance in late seventeenth-century Pennsylvania, then, insofar as he represents the citizen rag collector, he is absent from late eighteenth-century anxiety-ridden accounts of papermaking. Presumably when Frame writes that, “when on our backs [linen] is well worn, / Some of the same remains Ragged and Torn; / Then of those Rags our Paper it is made,” he actively delivers those rags to the papermill. Eighteenth-century newspaper readers, like those in New Haven, apparently needed to be recruited to help complete the cycle. They were reminded that the newspapers and printers would cease unless they, patriotically collected the rags off their backs:

The Subscribers therefore, to prevent these inconveniences, and as far as they are able to promote the public good, confidently with their own private advantage, have... lately erected and finished a PAPER MILL, at New Haven.... But as the success of this undertaking absolutely depends upon their receiving sufficient supplies of COTTON and LINEN RAGS, without which, the manufacture of paper cannot by any means be carried on, hereby earnestly solicit and hope to obtain assistance and encouragement from all persons of both sexes, more especially from the good women, who are friends to the freedom and interest of America, and this place in particular, in collecting supplies of this essential requisite to paper-making; which might easily be done, by a constant care and attention to save the cotton and linen rags.... The great difficulty of obtaining supplies of rags to support a paper manufacture, arises, not from their real scarcity or insufficient quantity; but from their inconsiderable value, which affords no immediate inducement equivalent to the trouble of saving them;—the inducement therefore must arise from the love of our country, and the benefit that individuals will receive, in a full enjoyment of freedom and property in common with the whole community in general.... We are the public’s humble servants, THE PROPRIETORS OF THE MILL, Who will give Two Pence per pound for clean cotton and linen rags.²⁹

According to these advertisements, simply reading newspapers and participating in public debate aren’t what generates the public sphere or a print-nationalist structure of feeling. It also entails entering into the material circuit of linen and paper. National feeling—“love of country” and a sense of the “public good”—here pertains to “collecting supplies of this essential requisite to paper-making.” Nationalism is not produced merely by the ar-

rival of the newspaper in serial time, but produced from the specter of its absence. Here, the idea of the nation does not arise out of the notion of a stranger who reads the same text elsewhere, but of the stranger whose rags are mixed into paper along with your own.

And as the above appeal to “the good women” makes clear, this form of being in “common with the whole community in general” is not limited to men. The promotional literature issued by papermakers linked rag-collection to what Linda Kerber has called “republican motherhood” in order to mobilize women’s para-industrial labor, attempting to harmonize the interests of nation, commerce, and citizenry. While John Locke’s 1690 *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* makes an early link between the raising of children and paper itself (“white Paper receives any characters”), papermakers linked women’s work as rag collectors to the republican imperative to raise and educate patriotic capable children, nurtured into proper forms of citizenship.³⁰ An 1808 advertisement from a paper mill in Fort Edward, New York, is but one example of the way giving rags was associated with the work of republican motherhood in which “the Republican Mother integrated political values into her domestic life”: “It is not thought that this appeal to our countrywomen will prove unavailing when they reflect that without their assistance they cannot be supplied with the useful article of paper.... For clean cotton and linen rags of every colour and description, matrons can be furnished with bibles... [and] mothers with grammars, spelling books, and primers for their children.” If, in Linda Kerber’s account of republican womanhood, “righteous mothers were asked to raise the virtuous male citizens on whom the Republic depended,” then ensuring the supply of paper by collecting rags was an activity understood to directly connect domestic and political life.³¹ This demonstrates how manufacturers framed women’s domestic labor as an essential prerequisite for the fulfillment of the ideal role of educators and moral influencers. Without rags, no paper, and without paper, no books, bibles, or primers.

Such arguments were common in calls for rags. Near the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, a Portland, Maine newspaper called for “the attention of the LADIES, [and other] inhabitants of the District...,” to “invite all persons, whether rich or poor, old or young, male or female, but more especially of the sex last mentioned, to be very attentive to the *Saving of Rags*.” The owners of the new paper mill declared,

It must afford pleasure and satisfaction to patriotic minds to reflect that while in the pursuit of any private business... they are at the same time promoting that of the public.... They will receive a gen-

erous price for the Rags they may have and be intitled [sic] to the thanks of all their fellow citizens: For there is not a man, woman or child who *reads* or *writes*, nor one who uses PAPER for the various purposes to which is constantly applied, but would be benefitted by the manufacture of that useful article, Therefore, *Save your Rags*.³²

This ad copy deploys the rhetoric of republican motherhood by explicitly “politicizing private behavior,” framing the domestic space of the home and the domestic space of the nation as parallel spheres of women’s influence without granting women full citizenship in the nation.³³ Thus we see the paper mill owners making the case that saving rags harmonizes the private interests of domestic economy with the public interest of domestic manufacture: “It must afford pleasure and satisfaction to patriotic minds to reflect that while in the pursuit of any private business... they are at the same time promoting that of the public.”

This call also hints at an appeal to the republican mother to educate and prepare male children for citizenship, through the figure of the literate child and its need for material: “For there is not a man, woman or child who *reads* or *writes*, nor one who uses PAPER for the various purposes to which is constantly applied, but would be benefitted by the manufacture of that useful article.” Saving rags for the paper mill is patriotic not merely because it conserves resources during uncertain political times—like in the midst of war—but also because of the special nature of its products (bibles, newspapers, primers) for creating citizens. Extending the work of the paper mill into the home is figured as a necessary precondition for other responsibilities of republican women, such as instruction in reading. Through this material textual route, women are highlighted as important figures in the production of the text and of the nation.

The Politics of Sense

The “technotexts” of paper read above create moments of reflexive reading, encouraging modulation between discussions of paper or papermaking and the very papers that bear them. They trace the relationship between paper and the work of governing and culture of belonging. And for readers in the present, these technotexts make visible past possibilities for the legibility of material textuality. If it was possible to read the newspaper *for news* and to generate imagined community, then these texts show it was also possible to

recognize its paper as a material community or a material commoning.³⁴ In that material community within paper, the heterogeneous mix of rags and the various labors (and the gendered bodies performing it) behind the finished thing become visible too. These technotexts cultivate a political sense of the material textuality of paper. They renegotiate what Jacques Rancière calls “the distribution of the sensible,” which Elizabeth Maddock Dillon has recently described as the aesthetic site of politics where “sensory apprehension” delineates “*phonê* and *logos*—sound (mere noise) as distinct from language.”³⁵ When is paper visible and legible? That is, when is it mere noise to be blocked out and when is it understood to convey meaning or represent people, and to whom, when? Following these technotextual recalibrations of our sense of noise and langue can reshape our attention to how the very materiality of the archive reveals new agencies and new meanings. Those who because of their class, race, or gender were disallowed from identification in formal and literary publics that formed around what was written *on* paper, could be, and likely were, part of the material common represented *within* paper.

Thus, when we center paper and its materiality in our accounts of print and nation, a wider range of subjects, bodies, and relations come into view. On November 14, 1777, the *North Carolina Gazette* issued a promise to young female readers: “The young ladies are assured, that by sending to the paper mill an old handkerchief, no longer fit to cover their snowy breasts, there is a possibility of its returning to them again in the more pleasing form of a *billet doux* from their lovers.”³⁶ Borrowed from *The Spectator*, this call relies on an intimate circuit between the female body, the paper mill, and the circulation of a material text. The encounter with paper is constructed as sensual, and not only because of the sexualized imagery. It suggests that paper engaged the senses of those who wrote on it, read from it, exchanged it, and sent rags from their bodies and homes to become it. This sensual engagement with the material text meant that traces of women, children, laborers, and unknown others inhered in encounters with paper. The imagined community of early national America did indeed construct itself through newspapers and common reading, but that was in recognition that first women needed to collect rags from the community and mingle them together: a commonality more literal than imagined.

Notes

I would like to thank Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, Brigitte Fielder, Shirley Samuels, and *Book History*'s anonymous reviewers for making contributions that greatly benefitted the writing and revision of this essay.

1. M. Emory Wright, *The Parson's Paper Mill at Holyoke, Mass. Embracing A Minute Description of the Paper Manufacture in its Various Departments* (Springfield, Mass.: Samuel Bowles & Company, Printers, 1857), 19–20.

2. As Sandra Gustafson has argued, Americanist criticism has, following Michael Warner's *Letters of the Republic*, "integrated Habermas's concept of the bourgeois public sphere with history of the book methodology." Sandra M. Gustafson, "American Literature and the Public Sphere," *American Literary History* 20, no. 3 (2008): 465. Warner linked questions of print technology, public-making circulation, and early republican nationalism. Around the same time, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* offered a model of national communal affiliation that engaged both print circulation and imagination or narrative, further solidifying critical connections between the study of nationalisms, literatures, and print cultures. Numerous critiques followed that posited the importance of other media such as voice and performance (Jay Fliegelman, Chris Looby, Sandra Gustafson), or that spoke to gendered, raced, and political subjectivities structurally left out of the Habermasian models (Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, Joanna Brooks, Anna Brickhouse). But even within these critiques, questions of who is represented in print, to and through whom print circulates, and how that shapes our understanding of nations, publics, and communal affiliations represent a major thread of scholarship over the last twenty five years.

3. Writing for the *New York Times*, Jennifer Schuessler said Gitleman's and Kafka's work represented "an emerging body of work that might be called 'paperwork studies.'" "The Paper Trail Through History," *New York Times*, December 17, 2012, p. C1.

4. Lisa Gitelman, *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media Theory of Documents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 25.

5. Gitelman, *Paper Knowledge*, 25.

6. Ben Kafka, *The Demon of Writing: Powers and Failures of Paperwork* (New York: Zone Books, 2012), 44, 47.

7. N. Katherine Hayles, *Writing Machines* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 25.

8. In the colonies that would become the United States, paper was made from the recycled rags of linen, and eventually cotton, from at least 1690. Rags would continue to be the primary ingredient until 1867 when wood pulp-based production surpassed rag-based. For an up to date history of papermaking this period see the introductory chapters of John Bidwell's *American Paper Mills, 1690–1832: A Directory of the Paper Trade with Notes on Products, Watermarks, Distribution Methods, and Manufacturing Techniques* (Hanover, N.H.: Dartmouth College Press, 2013). "Material metaphor" is another concept that Hayles develops alongside technotext. "Material metaphor" is a "term that foregrounds the traffic between words and physical artifacts." Hayles, *Writing Machines*, 22.

9. Wright, *The Parson's Paper Mill*, 7–8.

10. Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), xiii.

11. Trish Loughran's *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation-Building, 1770–1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007) is a notable recent exception.

12. Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, no. 367, May 1, 1712, 193.

13. Addison, *The Spectator*, 193.

14. Addison, *The Spectator*, 194.

15. *The Providence Gazette; and Country Journal*, March 22, 1777, 4.

16. Frank O. Butler, *The Story of Paper-Making, an Account of Paper-Making from Its Earliest Known Record Down to the Present Time* (Chicago: J.W. Paper Company, 1901), 37–38. This story may be apocryphal; Tennent’s “Defensive War” was printed by Franklin in 1748, and thirty years seems a long time to keep 2,500 sermon pamphlets pending payment. As with most stories about Franklin, however, the persistence of its circulation and the value of the story for those who retell it seems more significant than its veracity. Another version of this story is told about the pacifist *Martyr’s Mirror* being used at wadding. See David Luthy, “The Ephrata Martyrs’ Mirror: Shot From Patriots’ Muskets,” *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage* 9, no. 1 (1986): 2–5.

17. Jacques Derrida, “Paper or Me, You Know... (New Speculations on a Luxury of the Poor),” in *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 58

18. Derrida, “Paper or Me, You Know...,” 57.

19. Derrida, “Paper or Me, You Know...,” 58.

20. *A Poetical Dream Concerning Stamped Papers*, in *A New Collection of Verses Applied to the First of November, A.D. 1765, &c. Including a Prediction that the S---p-A-t shall not tak Place in North-America, Together with A poetical DREAM CONCERNING Stamped PAPERS* (New Haven: B. Mecom, 1765), 19.

21. *A Poetical Dream Concerning Stamped Papers*, 20–22.

22. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (New York: Verso, 2006), 35–36.

23. *A Poetical Dream Concerning Stamped Papers*, 23.

24. *A Poetical Dream Concerning Stamped Papers*, 23.

25. Robert Darnton, “What is the History of Books?,” *Daedalus* 111, no. 3 (1982): 68.

26. “New-Haven Paper-Mill” (*Connecticut Journal*, February 19, 1777).

27. “To the Ladies,” *The Connecticut Courant and Hartford Weekly Intelligencer*, Monday, September 29, 1777.

28. Richard Frame, “A Short Description of Pennsilvania, Or, a RELATION What things are known, enjoyed, and like to be discovered in the said Province Presentted as a Token of Good Will to the People of England” (Philadelphia: William Bradford, 1692), 7–8.

29. “New-Haven Paper-Mill.”

30. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

31. Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 11, 10. Fort Edward newspaper quoted in the “The Rag Supply A Hundred Years Ago”: *World’s Trade Paper Review*, January 20, 1893.

32. *Eastern Herald*, August 17, 1795, 4.

33. Linda K. Kerber, *Toward an Intellectual History of Women: Essays* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 16.

34. In my use of the language of the commons and commoning, I am heavily influenced by Elizabeth Maddock Dillon’s recent work in *New World Drama: The Performative Commons in the Atlantic World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

35. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. by Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), 13; Dillon, *New World Drama*, 9.

36. Quoted in Dard Hunter, *Papermaking: The History and Technique of an Ancient Craft* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1978), 310.